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Abu Ghurayb Prison

Baghdad Central Detention Center was formerly known as Abu Ghurayb Prison.

The Abu Ghurayb (pronounced ah-boo GRAYB), [Abu Ghraib] prison is located approximately 20 miles west of Baghdad is where Saddam Kamal (who was head of the Special Security Organization) oversaw the torture and execution of thousands of political prisoners. The prison was under the control of the Directorate of General Security (DGS) also known as the Amn al-Amm.

As many as 4000 prisoners were executed at Abu Ghraib Prison in 1984. At least 122 male prisoners were executed at Abu Ghraib prison in February/ March 2000. A further 23 political prisoners were executed there in October 2001.

The facility occupies 280 acres with over 4 kilometers of security perimeter and 24 guard towers. The prison is composed of five distinct compound each surrounded by guard towers and high walls. Built by British contractors in the 1960s, Abu Ghraib is a virtual city within a city. The political section of Abu Ghraib was divided into "open" and "closed" wings. The closed wing housed only Shi'ites. The open wing held all other varieties of real or suspected activists. The "closed" wing was so named because its inmates -- at least until 1989 -- were permitted no visitors or outside contact. Cells measured approximately four meters by four meters and held an average of 40 persons.

As of 2001 Abu Ghraib prison, west of Baghdad, may have held as many as 15,000 persons, many of who were subject to torture. Hundreds of Fayli (Shi'a) Kurds and other citizens of Iranian origin, who had disappeared in the early 1980's during the Iran-Iraq war, reportedly were being held incommunicado at the Abu Ghurayb prison. Such persons have been detained without charge for close to 2 decades in extremely harsh conditions. Many of the detainees were used as subjects in the country's outlawed experimental chemical and biological weapons programs.

As of early 2002 the Iraqi government reported to the US that sum of 12.2 million Iraqi dinars had been earmarked for the construction of six prison blocks, four in the Abu Ghraib prison and two in the governorate of Babil prison, to accommodate 7,200 prisoners. The work had already begun. Ongoing construction activity, apparent as of mid-November 2002, suggests that Iraqi regime was planning for an increase in prison population either due to increased repression or an increase in anti-governmental activity. Four new prison compounds appear to be in the early stages of construction. The foundation and footings are either being dug or concrete has been poured.

Saddam Hussein declared an unprecedented amnesty to thank the Iraqi people for their "unanimity" in the referendum of October 2002, which extended his powers for another 7 years.

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The "full and complete amnesty" applied to any Iraqi imprisoned or arrested for political or other reason but reportedly murderers on a death row will be released only with consent of the victims' families. Iraq's Revolutionary Command Council (RCC), the state's supreme authority, issued an amnesty to all prisoners in Iraq.

When Saddam announced his general amnesty for virtually all the nation's prisoners, the mob that assembled outside the Abu Ghraib prison started what looked like a traditional anti-American rally. They chanted praises to their dictator and shouted "Down Bush!" But the mood changed once it became clear the prisoners could bust through the gates without any resistance from guards. One guard turned toward an American photographer, smiled, stuck a thumb up and said, "Bush! Bush!"

Abu Ghuraib prison was reported to be deserted following the amnesty. However, many prisoners remained unaccounted for and according to one report Iraqi TV acknowledged that there was no freedom for those convicted of "the crimes of spying for the Zionist entity [Israel] and United States" although it fails to give numbers. According to another news report authorities claimed that 13,000 inmates were released from Abu Ghuraib prison, however numbers were unconfirmed.

There have been several press reports of mass graves within the perimeter or near the prison, but this is not apparent from imagery alone. Further analysis using ground truth imagery and human sources may help confirm the existence and location of any mass graves.

This commercial satellite imagery should prove valuable to human rights groups and the effort to bring those guilty of abuses and war crimes to trial in the future.

The Iranian dissident group Mujahedeen Khalq was based at Abu Ghraib, west of Baghdad.

An Iraqi detained at the Abu Ghuraib prison complex was killed when he and seven others sought to escape on 13 June 2003, CENTCOM announced in a 14 June 2003 press release on its website. All seven of the other escapees were injured in the incident, two critically. According to CENTCOM, coalition military-police guards fired several shots "in self-defense" and in an effort to prevent the escape attempt. "Detainees throwing rocks and brandishing shanks [sic] rushed the guards," the press release stated. One guard was slightly injured. The escape attempt was the second in as many days. Two prisoners attempted to escape detention at Baghdad International Airport on 12 June 2003.

On 16 August 2003 three mortar rounds were fired into the Abu Grahb prison on the outskirts of Baghdad, killing six Iraqi detainees and injuring many more. About 500 prisoners, including common criminals and suspected anti-American guerillas, are housed in tents, while the main prison building is being renovated.

Coalition forces engaged an individual in the vicinity of the Abu Ghyriab prison 17 August 2003. The individual was later identified as a reporter. The individual was evacuated to the 28th Combat Support Hospital and was pronounced dead on arrival.

Some five thousand people were being held at the prison as of April 2004. On 21 April 2004 at least 21 prisoners were killed when suspected anti-coalition rebels shelled Baghdad's largest prison in what a US general says might have been a botched attempt to free insurgents detained for taking part in the uprising against coalition forces. US General Mark Kimmitt said those killed in the prison attack were all security detainees round up by coalition forces. "We have initial reports that 18 mortar rounds were fired earlier this afternoon at the Baghdad confinement facility. Preliminary reports indicate that more than 21 detainees were killed and more than 100 wounded."

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In late April 2004, a number of photographs surfaced which depicted abuse and torture of Iraqi prisoners held at the Abu Ghurayb prison while in US custody. Some of the pictures published depict US soldiers, both men and women in military uniforms, laughing and giving thumbs-up signs while posing with naked Iraqi prisoners made to stand, stacked in a pyramid or positioned to perform sex acts. This follows the March 2004 announcement by the US Army that six members of the [800th Military Police Brigade](#) were being investigated for allegedly abusing about 20 prisoners at Abu Ghurayb.



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